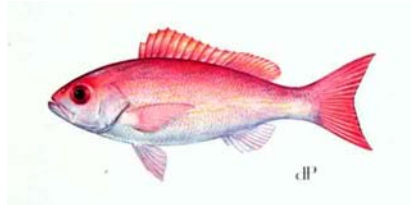


Snapper and Grouper Management in South Atlantic Federal Waters

Amendment 16 – Vermilion Snapper, Gag, and Shallow Water Groupers

Frequently Asked Questions

June 2009



What is Amendment 16 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Fishery?

- Amendment 16 was developed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) to end overfishing of vermilion snapper and gag, and protect shallow-water grouper species during their spring spawning season.
- The Council approved Amendment 16 during its September 2008 meeting in Charleston, SC, and submitted the amendment to NOAA Fisheries Service for review.
- NOAA Fisheries Service partially approved Amendment 16 on March 25, 2009. The provision requiring the use of venting tools was not approved.
- A final rule that implements the new management measures approved in Amendment 16 published in the Federal Register on June 29, 2009, and becomes effective on July 29, 2009 (74 FR 30964).
- The new regulations are listed in the table below.

Recreational	
Grouper aggregate bag limit	3 fish
Gag/black grouper bag limit within aggregate	1 gag or black grouper (combined)
Vermilion snapper bag limit	5 fish
Shallow water grouper* closed season	January-April
Vermilion snapper closed season	November-March
Commercial	
Shallow water grouper* closed season	January-April (all shallow water groupers*)
Gag quota	352,940 lbs gutted weight
Vermilion snapper quota	315,523 lbs gutted weight (January-June); 302,523 lbs gutted weight (July-December)
* Gag, black grouper, red grouper, scamp, red hind, rock hind, coney, yellowfin grouper, yellowmouth grouper, and tiger grouper	

- The final rule for Amendment 16 will also: Specify the total allowable catch and define interim allocations for gag and vermilion snapper; update management reference points for gag and vermilion snapper; and reduce bycatch of snapper-grouper species by requiring the use of dehooking devices (as needed) for a person on board a vessel to fish for snapper-grouper species in the South Atlantic Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

Why was the venting provision in Amendment 16 disapproved by the Secretary?

- The Secretary disapproved the provision requiring the use of venting tools, as necessary, because there is new scientific information indicating venting may not be safe for all snapper-grouper species. The requirement to use dehooking tools, as necessary, to reduce bycatch mortality will be implemented.

Why are additional management measures being implemented for vermilion snapper and gag in the South Atlantic?

- Vermilion snapper and gag are undergoing overfishing. Overfishing means fish are being harvested from a particular stock at too high a rate.
- Thus, a reduction in harvest from the commercial and recreational sectors is needed to end overfishing of these species.

A new stock assessment indicates gag is experiencing overfishing; however, the overfishing status for other shallow-water grouper species is dated or unknown. Why does the final rule for Amendment 16 implement a four-month commercial and recreational closure for all shallow water grouper species and not just gag?

- Red grouper and black grouper are experiencing overfishing, scamp is not experiencing overfishing, and the overfishing status of rock hind, red hind, coney, graysby, yellowmouth grouper, yellowfin grouper, and tiger grouper is unknown.
- Gag and other shallow-water grouper species are vulnerable to overfishing because they change sex, many are long lived, and some species (e.g. gag, black grouper, scamp, red hind, and tiger grouper) form spawning aggregations at known locations.
- Therefore, the intent of Amendment 16 is to protect shallow water grouper species during the January-April spawning season, regardless of their status.
- Extending the spawning season closure for just gag and black grouper to other shallow-water groupers could have positive biological effects including protecting spawning aggregations, increasing the percentage of males, enhancing reproductive success, and increasing the magnitude of recruitment.
- Gag and other shallow-water grouper species (black grouper, red grouper, scamp, red hind, rock hind, yellowmouth grouper, tiger grouper, yellowfin grouper, graysby, and coney) spawn during January-April.

How will the final rule for Amendment 16 allocate gag harvest between commercial and recreational sectors and what is the rationale for setting it at this level?

- The final rule for Amendment 16 allocates 51% of the total allowable catch to the commercial sector and 49% to the recreational sector.
- This is based on data from 1999-2003 is the closest to the Snapper-Grouper Advisory Panel's (AP) recommendation for a 50/50 allocation.
- The AP examined the landings data and noted the distribution of catch was about 50/50 in recent years and felt this was fair among the two sectors.

How will the final rule for Amendment 16 allocate harvest of vermilion snapper between the commercial and recreational sectors and what is the rationale for setting it at this level?

- The final rule for Amendment 16 will allocate 68% of the total allowable catch to the commercial sector and 32% to the recreational sector.
- The Council examined landings data and noticed little fluctuation in the commercial and recreational landings over time. The allocation reflects a continuous long-term landings trend.

Did Amendment 16 take the new stock assessment for vermilion snapper into consideration?

- Based on the results from the new stock assessment, the new management measures, as adjusted by the Regional Administrator include: A directed commercial quota of 315,523 lbs gutted weight from January through June; a directed commercial quota of 302,523 lbs gutted weight from July through December; a five fish bag limit, and a recreational closure from November through March.

Why is red snapper not included in the final rule for Amendment 16?

- Management measures for red snapper, including a rebuilding plan, are being developed in Amendment 17.
- At the March 2009 Council meeting, the Council voted (7-6) to request an interim rule to address overfishing of red snapper.
- In a letter to NOAA Fisheries Service dated March 23, 2009, the Council requested a prohibition on harvest and possession of red snapper to be implemented through interim measures. NOAA Fisheries Service is currently developing an interim rule, which will be available for public comment.

Where can I find a copy of Amendment 16?

- The most recent Final Environmental Impact Statement for Amendment 16 can be found at: www.safmc.net.